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Influences of Political Economy on international Radio broadcasting : the case of Radio E.

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Abstract:

The European Commission has both an economic and political influence on international radio broadcasters. In 1993, the European Commission, with directions DG IX and DG X, proposed to European international radio broadcasters to create a European station on a digital platform, with DAB technology¹. The European program Eureka 147 promoted "European Digital Radio" (EDR), which gave birth to "Radio E". The BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle Radio, Radio France Internationale and Radio Netherlands Worldwide decided to join the project. The first setback was the technology itself: Digital Audio Broadcasting did not suit international broadcasting. Secondly, cooperation between broadcasters was difficult. Radio E, which came from an economical and political impulse within the EC, did not completely succeed in promoting communication about Europe.

Keywords: European Union, digitization, international broadcasters, radio E

Introduction

No economic phenomenon exists by itself. The economy conforms to legal norms or eventually, bypasses them. It can even take advantage of a deficit legislation. At the same time, in each country, economic direction is defined by ideology. In a global world, political economy implies many forms of governance: not only by the countries, but also from international trusts and moreover from the financial system. We want here to analyse the case of Radio E, an European broadcasting project which involved the international broadcasters of Europe, RFI, DW Radio, BBC World Service and Radio Vlanderen International in a European Commission project. For the broadcasters, the financial opportunities presented by the project are linked to the acceptance of dealing with Europe and broadcasting with DAB technology (Kleinstеuber, 2002).

Indeed, at the beginning of the 1990's, European Commission tried to promote DAB as a technological and economic challenge, through the program Eureka 147. The second motivation of the EC was to enhance and improve communication about its actions: «The success of European integration depends essentially on the way Europeans perceive Europe. Until now, few serious attempts have been launched to give European citizens suitable information. When events happen in foreign countries they are more often shown from a national point of view».

On one hand, radio is considered as the most efficient mass media. On the other hand, international broadcasters, because they are familiar with multi-national points of view, could be the ideal «European media».

¹« It was related to DAB's launching. » Joachim Lenz, Programming Director. DW, 10/08/04.

Economic and political influences on radio technology

In the first part, I want to present how economy and politics are connected to each other, since they are interdependent, on a national level as well as on an international level. I also propose a description of the way radio broadcasting is involved in political economy.

Why must political and economic context be taken into account ?

Media sciences consider the institutional aspects of media systems, with particular attention to the relationships between industries, consumers, advertisers, and the state. There has always been a strong link between industry and political power. For example, Emperor Meiji opened up Japan to the western technology at the end of the 19th century, and in 1860, Napoleon III signed a free trade treaty with Great Britain.

On one hand, industry plays an important part in national economy. On the other hand, states prefer not to let industry follow its own evolution.

Industry can be defined as an activity which transforms raw materials in factories. But it means also: conception, research, control and organization tasks. From the industrial evolution depends productivity increase, consumption increase and modification of way of life. Industry has the multiple role to create products, offer employment, generate incomes and it is also an interface with the rest of the world.

That is why politics guide firms to particular productions, proposes installation of factories in particular places inside or outside of the state, win new markets and influences consumers. Industrial activity clearly serves political objectives.

Radio and political governance

In France, the first experiments of radio happened in 1898, from the Eiffel Tower. But until 1921, radio frequencies were dedicated to navy and army (Chupin, 2009: 50). Patrice Flichy writes about cultural industries: "Radio and television are characterized by short life products, a discontinuous programming, a wide broadcasting and a strong dependence to politics" (1991: 55).

Apart from radio contents, technological aspects of radio broadcasting belong to industrial system. Radio has always been used by the political power. Indeed radio listening does not require specific knowledge, that is why radio has always been viewed as a popular media. Easier to access than press, and even more popular than TV, which is also much less mobile. The authorities care about this technical product, in order to use it for their own communication and, in order to control it in a democratic way.

But there is also an economic reason for the political power to care about such a fantastic media as radio. To help radio to develop in a country, the government has to get involved, in particular about the issue of manufacturing and distribution of radio sets. People can more massively buy radio sets if the government enforces the broadcasting industry and contribute to make radio sets cheaper.

Governments have to make their stances on issues such as regulation and norms, particularly in order to maintain the monopoly on the national radio – if desired –, and in order to avoid interference. In the United States, Federal Radio Commission coordinated the attributions of broadcasting licences since 1927. Political interventions differ from one state to another. For example, since 1920's the United States use medium waves – which are suitable for big American cities. On the contrary, France chose at the same time long waves and short waves, because they allow to broadcast in all the national territory and outside the national territory.

In France, centralization chose together political and economic: "As SFR (Société Française Electrique) launched the first private radio station in France in 1922, it used long waves in order to sell French radio sets in the local market, which were necessarily different than the American ones. It aimed naturally at competing American firms". Moreover, the Allies would have voluntarily maintained the medium wave in German broadcasting after World War II, so as to prevent Germany from becoming centralized and strong (Flichy, 1991: 67).

Actually Patrice Flichy suggests that broadcasting must be seen as a real branch of the government, apart from the market economy, and through an ideological and political focus. Indeed, economic and political decisions about radio industry aim at creating a communication space, with specific norms.

We can remind that political power acts not only on public service stations, but influences also all type of broadcaster. One of the most important way to influence broadcasting consists in awarding funds (Toussaint-Desmoulins, 2004).

Some stations develop production and broadcast of programmes which have been ordered by administrations but grants programs can also concern radio technology and not only radio contents.

The era of globalization and digitization

The influence of political economy on broadcasting has to take account two parameters: first of all, the so-called globalization and then, in this global context, the digitalisation.

At European level many directives and regulation measures concern radio, such as Radio and Telecommunications Terminal Equipment Directive (1999/5/EC) and Radio Spectrum Decision 676/2002/EC, which both concern equipment. Some others concerns Networks and Services and other specific services.²

As we wrote above, public radio stations are often part of international structures. In Europe, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) gather them since 1950. It is an outcome of International Broadcasting Union (IBU), founded in 1925, which aimed at distributing and controlling broadcasting zones. Indeed, short waves were then commonly used and they have the characteristic to broadcast beyond the borders.

Priorities of EBU evolved from its first task of technical standards' harmonization to live and simultaneous broadcasting of popular events, such as the crowning of Elizabeth II³, which was broadcasted at the same time in Belgian, Germany, France, Netherlands and United States. In 1959, sport programs are still the most numerous of these cooperating programs. Swaps are not strictly European, because EBU gathers not only the twenty-seven states of European Union but also Turkey, Libya, Syria, Israel, Jordanian, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Moreover there are exchanges with others international broadcasting unions, such as Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union, North American Broadcaster's Association, Arab States Broadcasting Union. Of course, all states do not participate equally, even in the European circle strictly (Marchetti, 2004).

But the EBU still cares about technical issues, and today digitization is the main worry. Since the early 1990's, Digital Audio Broadcasting, then Digital Radio Mondiale and internet broadcasting are debated. "New technologies also causes confusion between paper, waves and screen" (Toussaing-Desmoulins, 2004: 119).

The case of Radio E

Description of the project

What? In 1993, the European Commission, via directions DG IX and DG X, offers to international radio broadcasters a project of European station on a digital support, with the DAB technology. At that time, the project was called "European Digital Radio". It consisted in creating an European radio station, whose programmes would be produced by several international radio broadcasters of Europe. A document of 1993 mentions the resulting project, "Radio E" and specifies: "Radio E should in the long term become a public European station. European by its programs and European by its broadcasting zone".⁴

How? It would have been possible thanks to "DAB development. (...) The system "Eureka 147" allows not only digital broadcasting, but it also offers to ear several programs from an single frequency".

² European Communication Office (ECO), Denmark and European Telecommunications Standards Institut (ETSI), France (April 2011). *The European regulatory environment for radio equipment and spectrum*. With support of the European Commission.

³ On February 6th of 1952, in London.

⁴ This document of four pages is entitled "R:E RADIO. E Programm für Europa. Program for Europe. Programme pour l'Europe", is prior to October 1994, cited as the beginning of the pilot.

The principle would have been an unique European broadcaster, with simultaneous programs in German, English, French and Italian. The project was really exciting and universalist in a way. It represented a real revolution, because language barriers were no longer an obstacle.

Why? In the nineties, radio technology, as far as the entire cultural production, was focused on digitalisation. Different norms appeared, and the governments wondered which one should be chosen. As frequencies are still controlled at a political level, the European Union also tried to introduce the expected norm. DAB for Europe, would be chosen to avoid the DAB for United States, probably to avoid an American hegemony in this field. The project of an European broadcaster, born from the cooperation of the main European international broadcasters serves European Union expectation about DAB European norm.

Who? Obviously, the broadcasters had to show interest and experience in broadcasting in many languages, in addition to their own national language. They should be public broadcasters, to facilitate the contact with European commission. RFI, the DW and the BBC played the main parts in this experience.

A brief experience

When I encountered the project Radio E in 2004, it was already slowly disappearing. The DAB experiment was done. And it did probably not succeed as expected. The Dutch station was not count any more among the partners. And the BBC World Service did not participate actively any more, as a producer.

How did it work at that time? Journalists from each broadcasting partner – BBC, DW and RFI – worked together on common programmes. There were three programmes, one for each language. In 2004, they were *Network Europe*, *Accents d'Europe* and *Europa, das Magazin so as Radio E*. Each broadcaster was responsible for the production of a radio program in its language. It was also no true any more for the BBC program *Network Europe* in 2004. The BBC kept a kind of cooperation with RFI and DWR in the context of Radio E, but did not keep the responsibility for the production of this program, that it stopped broadcasting. On the contrary, DWR and RFI did not only keep respectively the responsibility for *Europa das Magazin* and for *Accents d'Europe*, but also, together for *Network Europe*. Indeed, journalists we interviewed explained that they feared the project would become a French/German project, and not an European one any more.

Why did not the Radio E project succeed? If DAB can broadcast simultaneously many programmes on a same frequency, it did not prove any special benefit for international broadcasting. Another norm, called Digital Radio Mondiale, appeared some years later and seemed to be definitively more suitable to international broadcasting, because it suit to amplitude modulation, thus to short waves, so specific for worldwide radios.

Marie Kindler, journalist at DW Radio, said the renunciation of DAB was the first important halt in the project Radio E. She told us: "There was a first change when the unlucky DAB was given up".⁵ Clearly, the technical dimension of the project – DAB technology – was a setback. Professor Hans Jens Kleinsteuber expressed a severe appreciation of DAB, already in 1997. At first, the name DAB unfortunately reminds German people of the "Dortmunder Actien Brauerei" – "Dortmunder brewery" – which has the same initials, then DAB would be further incitement of the European Commission, "after HDTV, D2Mac, PAL Plus, and it does not correspond to any real need" (Kleinsteuber and Rosenbach, 1997).

In 2004, the programming director of DW underlines that there is still an antenna DAB in Berlin and he adds: «But it has nothing to do with Radio E. We also had one in Munich but we had to pay a lot for it, and we did not assume. The EU left the project in 1998 or 1999 and we had to pay everything, correspondents, technology, programming". So, the DAB project has been abandoned by those who decided it.

Yet, the setback of Radio E project itself is relative, since relationships have been created between international broadcasters of Europe, and cooperation's habits have been taken. Marie Kindler specified in 2004 the nature of the cooperation: "We send reports of about three to four minutes, and we broadcast sixteen minutes

⁵ 2004.

thirty seconds.(...) If we had to make the whole program only by ourselves, without cooperation, there would be less sounds, less colours, and less live reports than we can have thanks to cooperation”.

About the question of setback, the programming director of DW Radio concludes: «There has been a huge expectation, the project at the beginning was a 24 hours programme, an authentic radio station in German, English and French, plus Dutch, but it has been impossible, because it was too expensive. It didn't succeed, but the idea itself worked, obviously”.⁶

Is it right to conclude a setback?

As Dominique Marchetti and Eric Darras researched on European media, they concluded, about the EBU broadcasting exchanges: “(...)EBU moved from an original programming to popular programs essentially based on news and sports, which are profitable and at the same time which is not confrontational” (2004: 61). The two researchers affirmed it had been impossible to analyse the Europeanisation of media, as they initially expected, because they simply didn't find such a kind of media or of information: local or international focuses dominate, and European focus does not seem to exist. The case of TV is also a good example: “The willing to make same trade for the whole European TV in order to protect them from extra-European programs and by the way, to help emerging European programs has been very difficult” (Toussaint-Desmoulins, 2004:74). Patrice Flichy underlines that pan-European TV channel Sky Channel failed because programmes are still very national oriented. He means that linguistic gaps constitute a major obstacle for the creation of an international station, but adds that national differences are wider (Flichy, 1991). Industrial, economical, and sometimes, ideological projects of synergy must confront this dimension.

For sure, the Radio E project, supported by the European Commission and allowed by the DAB technology, did not succeed in becoming a real broadcaster, made by Europeans for Europeans. But it brought some interesting results: DAB – which has probably been tested in another way and through national project for example – has been chosen between others norms, in Germany and in Great Britain. The public broadcaster BBC can be listened thanks to new DAB radio sets. Besides the technological aspects, the sustainability of cooperation between journalists from the DW and from RFI is a very positive result. Nevertheless, the English partners left the project quite soon, and the cooperation went on only between journalists from the DW and RFI.

Digitalisation of radio: What is the role of political governance?

Radio broadcasting belongs to mass media as well as to cultural industry. And as a cultural industry, it is clearly dependent at the same time on the political governance and on the market economy. Nadine Desmoulins-Toussaint writes: “Technology and its know-how need heavy investments which can be only assumed by big private trusts or by public institutions” (2004: 7).

In the case of radio, ambiguity emerges from the mix of merchandising dimension and socio cultural objectives.

Digital radio in Europe : A current panorama

EBU has got a technological section, which naturally deals with digital systems for radio. The technological section also works with the radio section. On the EBU website, the current situation of radio digitalisation is enunciated as follows: “In Europe two main families of digital systems can be identified as primary broadcast distribution platforms for radio: EBU TECHNICAL is currently focussing on DAB/DAB+/T-DMB and DRM/DRM+, but also follows activities related to Internet radio. The EBU contributes to the development, promotion and harmonization of Digital Radio. EBU TECHNICAL is active member of different consortium as the DRM Consortium”.

⁶ Joachim Lenz, Programming Director. DW, 10/08/04.

But also a union of private broadcasters cares with the digitization issue. European Radio Association (ERA), based in Brussels, represents eleven private and commercial stations established in nine states of the European Union and Switzerland. The General Direction "Information society" of the European Commission asked them for a reflection about "switch over" in radio broadcasting.

United Kingdom and Germany follow approximatively the same way, since public services have been very willing of the development of DAB. In United Kingdom, the responsibility moved from the Radio Authority to the Ofcom. It is not the case in Germany, where federal system gives much more influence to the Länder. DAB conforms to the same laws as radio in general. In France, legal system do not seem to be ready for digital radio.

United Kingdom started to attribute digital frequencies in 1994, the BBC highly contributed to develop DAB. In Germany, it happened a bit later, and it seems to be still problematic. At last, one of the French difficulty lies in the fact there are too numerous stations on the national territory. More than DAB can handle.

In conclusion, it has been a long time between the European program Eurêka 147 (Goupil, 2004) of 1986, and the launch of first radio sets on the market. So long, that it is difficult to validate this programme today, in 2011.

State of international broadcasting in Europe

Technological innovations are easily seen as crucial. In 1997, Fritz Groothues, strategy director for the BBC World Service, announced: "Short waves broadcasting is old-fashion" (Cheval, 2008) Jean-Jacques Cheval underlined with Bernard Wuillème that the oldest global media – I mean, international broadcasting –, is particularly innovative in the change from the "poste radiophonique" to the "post radiophonie" (Cheval, 2008). For international broadcasters internet radio corresponds to their main objective of global audience.

Since the advent of digitalisation, BBC and RFI knew drastic changes, as regard to their budget. Lots of journalists had to leave these stations, and the number of languages spoken by these radios decreased. International broadcasters yet suffer from this new globalization of broadcasting, that nowadays concerns all station, equally local, national, international.

Raphaëlle Ruppen Coutaz, specialist for the international broadcasting in Switzerland (SRI), analyses the decline of short waves at the digital era. In March 1999, SRI opened the website swissinfo.ch in around ten foreign languages. The digital platform offered not only radio informations but it also hosted TV productions of the SSR and many multimedia resources. The former director Nicolas Lombard says it is still radio, "but nowadays interactive radio must also offer text and image". Finally Jean-Marc Sandoz underlined in 2000: "Internet saved our radio. When it abandoned satellite to become a multimedia platform, SRI found a new legitimacy".⁷ SRI abandoned short waves in 2004. Maybe satellite technologies (WorldSpace) and digital technologies (Digital Radio Mondiale) are at last efficient, but it is too late, and moreover, too expensive.⁸ The period after the Cold War has been particularly difficult for international broadcasters, especially in Europe. Which legitimacy can be found, in a global world, where Europe is unified and not any more torn in two between capitalism and communism, URSS and United States? (Ruppen Coutaz, 2009).

There is no more legitimacy for this type of broadcast, and accordingly, no money.

Like RFI and the BBC World Service, it is considered that SRI costs too much for the State. Strategy is the same in all countries: to keep a unique staff for information – whereas big international broadcasting has got its proper staff – and to limit the languages spoken. As result, news on international broadcasters can be seen as a recycling of inland information, and the decrease of spoken languages is synonymous of a loss of prestige.

If international broadcasters mainly exist on the web, and barely on the air, it makes them again less legitimate, because all web radios are necessarily international. Nevertheless, radio is still the most important

⁷ *Le Matin*, 08.04.2000.

⁸ Interview of Meili Bernard (08.10.2009).

media in the world in terms of radio sets, and the most mobile media. Internet is now the global place, and contrary to short waves, it gives absolutely no specificity to international broadcasting.

In 2007 in his book dedicated to international broadcasters, Bernard Wuillème listed numerous international broadcasters that abandoned short waves since 1990, like the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria... and many others. And future of international broadcasting seems to get always darker. As if, at an era of globalization and digitization combined, it would become a marginal media, and maybe, it would die.

New framework of European Union to make radio broadcasters deal with Europe: Euranet

The European Union carries on with special funds for radio broadcasting, in order to "get talked about." The "no" in the referendums of 2005 in the Netherlands and France about the European constitution, worried a lot the European Union, which also took in consideration its bad scores in the pool of Eurobarometer⁹. These disturbing results allow to think that the European Union was not very well known and not well accepted by the people of Europe. Early in 2006, the European Commission published a "white paper on a communication policy of the EC". This report encouraged new communication plans.

"Euranet"¹⁰ was presented in February 2008 in Brussels by Margot Wallström, vice-president of the EC and Head of communication direction. Euranet is announced like a "pan-European mediatic consortium", financed by the EC with 5.8 millions Euros and for a five years period. It is not called "project", like Radio E was, but "consortium", which gives a more private and industrial aspect. The term of "pan-European", first used by Comte Kalergi, is barely used, and was absent from Radio E project. The wide integration of countries of the Eastern Europe is probably noticed by this way.¹¹ The term "pan-European" has probably been chosen instead of "European". It maybe proves a strategical change since the 2005 referendum. Moreover, the expression "transnational", chosen by the presentation of Euranet on its website, is used to define the tone of the programmes. It implies that journalists must go through their own borders. Finally, the adjective "pan-European" implies differences between European states and includes an ideological notion, but erases the political dimension.

Sixteen radio broadcasters of Europe, national or local, public or private, from thirteen states of the European Union¹² accepted the agreement of the European Commission on 2007. RFI and Deutsche Welle are among them, and seem to be particularly involved.¹³

Broadcasters are appealed to talk to the "European civil society", and not any more to the "European public space". The Euranet website broadcasts programs of the participating radio stations since April 2008. The thirty to sixty minutes programmes are also broadcast on the airwaves.

Conclusion

Two issues emerge from this case study: First, the dependence of international broadcasters on political governance, particularly in terms of subsidies relating to technical or content questions. As Nadine Toussaint-Desmoulins underlines, funds allocated to radio broadcasters are "short-time programs that exist as long as the donor gets money and that the media serves its interests or ideals" (2004: 32). Then, a potential depreciation in the amount of international broadcasting as they become online stations: "Radio is a specific media with proper characteristics and it is essential that it develops its own platform, without becoming a secondary service", warns the EBU.

9 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_fr.htm

10 www.euranet.eu

11 Integration wave of 2004.

12 Deutsche Welle Radio, RTBF, Bulgarian National Radio, RFI Sofia, Punto Radio Castilla y León, Radio France Internationale, Skai Radio, Hungarian Radio, Radio Netherlands Wereldomroep, RFI Romania, Polskie Radio Szczecin S.Å., Europa Lisboa, Czech Radio, Radio Romania International, Radio Slovenia International.

13 Erlends Calabuig from RFI and Petra Kohnen from the DW hold an important position in the consortium.

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